DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 247 604 CS 208 547

AUTHOR Kang, Myung Koo
TITLE A Critical Reflection on Comparative Communication Research Methods.
PUB DATE Aug 84
NOTE 38p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (67th, Gainesville, FL, August 5-8, 1984).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Communication (Thought Transfer); *Communication Research; *Comparative Analysis; Cross Cultural Studies; *Epistemology; Hypothesis Testing; *Intercultural Communication; International Studies; Mass Media; *Media Research; Models; *Research Methodology

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the unresolved epistemological and theoretical problems in comparative communication research. The first section examines what "comparative" means by reviewing various fields in the social sciences. The second section provides an overview of epistemic assumptions of comparative communication research and suggests that in the conflict between ideographic and nomothetic positions, researchers need to avoid methodological dogma and to be open to pluralism. It also presents arguments for the formulation of context-bound concepts being included in the domain of scientific discourse. Finally, it discusses the implication that a qualitative and quantitative dichotomy is not useful, and states that comparative communication researchers need to be conscious of the problem of context-boundness. The third section examines problems of comparability at the various stages of the research process: formulation of a comparable concept, selection of societies and research sites, and the development of equivalent measurement. Among the conclusions drawn in this section are: (1) that most research is conducted following the positivistic logic of science, and (2) that before investigating the "shade of meaning" embedded in social context, theoretical examination must take place in order to compare different social units. (CRH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED247604

A CRITICAL REFLECTION ON COMPARATIVE COMMUNICATION RESEARCH METHODS

by

Myung Koo Kang

School of Journalism and Mass Communication

University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa

1st Place, 1984 James W. Markham Student Paper Competition, International Communication Division, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.

Presented to the International Communication division, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Gainsville, Florida, August, 1984. The author is a Ph.D. candidate in Mass Communication.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Myung Koo Kang

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS208547

INTRODUCTION

To evaluate the quality of apples from different places or countries we compare them in terms of size, color, and taste. If we compare such symbolic apples as road apples[1] and Newton's, what kind of criteria could be used? What about Korean and American broadcasting systems that are being operated in a different social context? To answer these questions, two further considerations are crucial: what does "compare" mean and what does social context mean? This paper examines these unresolved epistemological and theoretical problems in comparative communication research.

Given these problems, the study of comparative communication research has evoked much confusion among student and scholar alike. In the comparative study of communication, a variety of terms are used loosely and interchangeably such as "international," "cross-cultural," "intercultural," and "cross-national" studies.

Another problem faces the students of comparative media research, that of a narrowly-focused, positivistic orientation. A vast literature dealing with methodological issues is concerned with the technical aspects of comparative research. Prezeworski and Teune (1970) point out that:

> (Comparative studies) have tended to view the problems of comparative research in terms of research difficulties, such as translating questionnaires, training interviewers, assuring accuracy of data, and have tended to ignore the insight of the area specialist: a nation, culture, or region must be considered as a 'whole' (p. xi).

Concerning the present state of the art in mainstream comparative communication research, considerable doubts are cast not only on the ability to formulate meaningful theoretical questions and valid empirical generalizations but also on the very potency of a social science which continues to operate exclusively within a rigid positivistic logic of comparative communication research. Beltran (1976), Gitlin (1978), and Halloran (1982) delve deeply into the problem and conclude that positivistic communication research is "policy-oriented," "instrumentalistic," and narrowly-defined "scientific" in terms of method.

All these problems imply the need of a new overview of comparative communication research. The purpose of this paper is to attempt to shed some light on a number of difficult and unresolved methodological issues that have plagued the comparative analysis of communication. The discussion which follows is divided into three sections: The first elaborates what "comparative" means, focusing on the basic assumptions and definitions of the comparative method. In the second section, discussion focuses upon the epistemological issues involved in making comparative application of qualitative and quantitative methods. The third section shall examine the problem of comparability at the various stage of the research process, each of which is illustrated with brief descriptions of several major works.

Few studies have examined problems of the comparative method in communication research field. To gain a coherent view, it is necessary to consider the development of the comparative research method in such disciplines as political science, sociology, and education. By reviewing problems of the comparative method in these diciplines, this paper may shed light on an unexplored but crucial aspect of comparative communication research. The focus of this essay will not be on interpersonal and intercultural communication but on mass communication. It must be noted here that although this paper is dealing with methodological aspects of the comparative research, theory and methodology are not separable. The question of how to approach the reality is necessarily connected to the researcher's theoretical perspective.

Definition: Comparative communication research

To avoid the confusion in using the terms, "cross-cultural," "cross-national," and "inter-cultural," it is necessary to examine what "comparative" means. Few studies pay attention to problems in defining this term. Edelstein (1982) defines comparative research as a study that "compares two or more nations with respect to some common activity." He differentiates comparative analysis from cross-cultural and cross-national research. When we study the news transmitted across national boundaries, the transfer of news makes our work cross-national, and the effects of the transfer makes it cross-cultural. But it

is still not clear why the transmission of news across national or cultural boundaries is not comparative.

In the literature of comparative inquiries a wide variety of meanings is attached to the term "comparative method." There are two contrasting groups of researchers when a definition of comparative methods is examined. The first group takes the view that any social scientific inquiries are "comparative." The second group emphasizes the distinctive nature of the comparative method from non-comparative methods.

Durkheim (1938) differentiated three levels of comparison: (a) variations within one society at one time; (b) variations in several similar societies (either at one time, or several times); and (c) variations in several dissimilar societies (either by time or place) which contain identical features. The first one is a typical way of examining given social facts in terms of how they vary by socio-demographic variables. The second and third are regarded as comparative methods which produce general statements on similar and dissimilar phenomena in different societies. According to Durkheim, comparative sociology which is using methods of comparison "is not a particular branch of sociology; it is sociology itself, in so far as it ceases to be purely descriptive and aspires to account for facts" (Durkheim, 1938; 139).

Along the same line, Smelser (1976) claims that comparative social scientific inquiry is not independent from the remainder

of social scientific inquiry. He argues that "the analysis of phenomena in evidently dissimilar units (especially different societies or cultures) should have no methodological problems unique to itself" (p. 3). It is mainly because social scientific inquiries are involved in comparing units that differ from one another in some respects. Lasswell(1968) and Almond(1966) broadly defined the comparative method as the scientific method in the sense that all scientific approaches include "comparision." Lasswell argues that "for anyone with a scientific approach to political phenomena the idea of an independent comparative method seems redundant" because the scientific approach is "unavoidably comparative" (p. 3).

In contrast to the claim that there is nothing truly distinctive about comparative research methods, several researchers provide different definitions of the comparative method. Examining the adequacy of comparative method, Mokrzycki (1979, 1982) and Niessen (1982) contend that the context-boundness makes comparative research distinct as a separate type of research. They argue the problem of comparative research comes not from comparing itself but from the "system-boundness" of social phenomena.

Marsh (1967), and Prezeworski and Teune (1970) argue that the comparative method must proceed at "multiple levels," that is, at the inter-system and at the intra-system level. According to them, if the patterns of relationship within each system and the

role of systemic factors are not examined at the same time, the analysis will not be considered as "comparative."

Payne (1971) rejected this broad definition of the comparative method, arguing that it does not clarify what marks off the comparative method from typical comparison in research. For him the first category of Durkheim's classification is not comparative because the comparative method is not simply a collection of differences from different societies. Rather it is concerned with (1) "the explicit testing of sociological theories with data from various sources, and (2) the nature of society as revealed by studying the operation and interrelation of key processes in different societies, or areas of societies (historical, geographical, social)" (Payne, 1971: 13).

Ragin (1982) contends that the comparative method is qualitatively different from the experimental and the statistical methods because it uses a particular explanatory unit, society. He says that the choice of explanatory unit is a metatheoretical act, and it has a profound effect on the practices of comparative sociology.

In this essay, I would like to take the position that the comparative method consists of some different forms of research procedures. To deal with the spatio-temporal context and to identify general rules of behavior, it requires studies that compare evidence across societies and cultures. As mentioned by Armer (1973), there are two features in the process of

comparative research which frequently accentuate the methodological problems. First, the comparative method deals with more than one society or culture that are foreign to the researcher; second, it involves comparisons across different socio-cultural systems.

If one takes the position on the distinctive nature of the comparative method, one can draw varying levels of comparative analysis such as "cross-cultural," "intersocietal," "cross-national," etc. In other words, "cross-cultural" or "cross-societal" studies are not distinct from comparative studies. Differing from Edelstein's definition, comparative studies encompass all of these different levels of analysis. If a study deals with culture, it can be a comparative study at a cross-cultural level. Such a distinction among different levels of analysis is important to reduce confused usage of these terminologies.[2]

A definition of comparative communication research can be drawn from the above discussion. Comparative communication research is the study of variations in similar and dissimilar communication phenomena in different societies or cultures. It is not just a description or collection of different communication phenomena from different societies. Comparative communication research is concerned with a) constructing communication theories with data from different societies, and b) the process of communication as social process by studying the

operation and interaction of the media between different societies and areas of societies.[3] Problems resulted from these unique features of comparative communication research are too varied to be examined in this paper. The next section briefly discusses the epistemological issues surrounding the comparative research, focusing on the conflict between "objective" and "subjective" approaches to the study of social reality.

Epistemic Assumptions of Comparative Communication Research

Goal of Comparative Communication Research

There are two contrasting positions in comparative research regarding the basic question, whether general statements about social reality are universally true or not: "phenomenological subjectivism" (and relativism) vs."positivistic objectivism" (Smelser, 1967) or "idiographic" vs. "nomothetic" approaches (Prezeworski and Teune, 1970). In the former position, an idiographic or relativistic one, no general statements can be universally true because the interaction of various characteristics within each society creates unique patterns of social relations and social structure. Whereas the idiographic form of statements specifies the unique context of different societies and makes all subsequent propositions, the nomothetic form of statements is "whenever and wherever X occurs, X is in a certain relation to Y" (Prezeworski and Teune, 1970: 14). This position constitutes a direct transference of the natural science

model to the study of social reality. In the nomothetic variant, the historical uniqueness of each society would be ignored because they are assumed to have no significant differences with respect to the focus of the study.

Do the idiographic and the nomothetic positions conflict? If so, how can this conflict be solved? Few comparative communication researchers have been concerned with these epistemic problems (Mowlana, 1976; Edelstein, 1980; Hur, 1982). However, these researchers seem to assume a one-sided orientation toward a nomothetic position. Mowlana points out that comparative mass communication analysis suffers from "poorly defined terms, vague and ambiguous concepts" and "culture-bound variables" which are major obstacles toward a generalized theory of communication. Edelstein (1976, 1982) argues that building conceptual equivalence across societies and cultures is essential for comparing similar and different communication behaviors and developing a generalized theory of communication. For them, the main goal of comparison is to contruct a theory of communication based on "accuracy, parsimony, generality, and causality" (Prezeworski and Teune: 20). Such a nomothetic orientation is dominant in comparative communication research.

Some questions must be raised: Why should building a general law or theory be the goal of the social sciences, and to what extent is this a realistic goal? (Winch, 1958; Tylor, 1979); Why is the goal of comparative communication research to build a

universal or generalized theory of communication phenomena by constructing nonculture-bound concepts Although philosophy of science does not provide a clear-cut solution to these questions, it can be held that it is a matter of preference whether one takes the nomothetic or ideographic goals of social science. Mokrzycki (1979) argues that positivist researchers do not demonstrate why "general law" is theoretically more important than "historical law" which "is bound up with a historically located social system" (p. 99). In sum, over the conflict between ideographic and nomothetic position, what comparative research needs is to avoid "methodological dogma" and to open a horizon toward "methodological pluralism" (Berting, 1979).

Qualitative vs. Quantitative Aspects of Comparative Communication Research

Another epistemic assumption of comparative research is related to qualitative and quantitative aspects of methodology. According to Schwartz and Jacobs (1979), while qualitative methods are to gain access to the life world of human actors by using natural language, quantitative methods are based upon clear, rigorous and reliable collection of data to test hypotheses in a logically consistent manner. Qualitative methods are usually employed by a phenomenological or actor's point of view approach. In contrast, quantitative methods are used by "positive" science.

I do not assume that qualitative and quantitative aspects of comparative research are exclusive and conflictual. Rather both are complementary. Sartori (1970) explains well why both aspects are complementary, saying that there exist two unsound extreme groups among political scientists: "unconscious thinker" and "overconscious thinker." While the former is purely and simply unconscious of the method, the latter holds strongly that standards of method and theory are drawn from the physical, "paradigmatic" science. Rejecting the "overconscious" thinker, the man who "refuses to discuss heat unless he is given a thermometer," Sartori contends that the scientist is the "conscious" thinker, the man who "realizes the limitations of not having a thermometer and still manages to say a great deal simply by saying hot and cold, warmer and cooler" (p. 1033). Although such a dichotomy of the social science method is not heuristic, it contrasts extreme positions on epistemic assumptions among comparative researchers.

As noted earlier, researchers who are oriented to a nomothetic goal of social science do not make any distinction between the comparative method and other social scientific methods such as experimental and statistical ones. According to Smelser (1976), the comparative method is not different from the experimental and the statistical methods, because all of these methods search for scientific explanations: 1) the establishment of general empirical relationships among two or more variables; 2) all "background" variables are controlled or held constant. The only

difference is that the number of cases it deals with is too small to permit systematic control by means of partial correlations. From this perspective, Lijphart (1971) summarizes the problem of comparative research as "many variables, small number of cases." Problems of many variables are common to other social science research regardless of the particular method. But problems of a small number of cases are peculiar to comparative research. For example, when an investigator compares broadcasting systems in different countries, the number of sample cases is limited and more variables are to be controlled.

If one follows such positivistic logic of science, case studies are "of almost no scientific value" (Campbell and Stanley, 1966: 6). One shot case studies, Campbell and Stanley argue, do not provide controlled relationships among variables. For these positivistic researchers, the comparative method and statistical method are regarded as approximation of the experimental method in the sense that the investigators can never be completely sure that variables are controlled in every aspect. The approximation of the experimental method in comparative research is to maximize the number of cases and minimize uncontrolled variables.

The above "approximation" strategy for controlling variables disregards the unique problem of context-boundness in comparative research. The problem of context-boundness is not just technical or methodological but epistemological. In order to connect

empirical phenomena with theoretical constructs and to interpret the context-bound events in terms of a consistent and systematic viewpoint, theoretical considerations and qualitative reasoning are necessary. In other words, to solve the problem of context-boundness is to bridge the "epistemological distance" (Loetsch, 1982) between the empirical data and social and national conditions. For bridging this epistemological distance, Scheuch (1968) and Bristlin, Lonner, and Thorndike (1973) underline "intimacy" with the country or culture to be investigated. For instance, even if American and South Korean workers spend the same amount of time in front of television set, the interpretation of these findings must take into account the situation that the use of television in two countries is somewhat different. Accordingly, the general concepts which reflect context-bound elements are not a "false ideologisation of empirical data," but an inevitable process for the meaningful interpretation of the data (Niessen, 1982). Niessen writes:

> Qualitative reasoning thus being indispensable in the process of establishing functional equivalence must neither be neglected and excluded from consideration nor be regarded and executed as impressionistic or exclusively subjective. Both attitudes keep it out of the realm of "scientific" consideration and thus away from any control. Rather, the decisive role which it plays demands its inclusion in the domain of scientific discourse (p. 88).

In short, concerning the unique feature of context-boundness in comparative research, a qualitative and quantitative dichotomy is not useful. To solve problems of context-boundness with a small number of cases, comparative researchers need not to be

"unconscious" or "overconscious," but "conscious" of the inevitable process of bridging the epistemological gap between the concepts and the empirical phenomena. To be conscious of this process, theoretical considerations and qualitative reasoning must be included in the scientific discourse.

So far I have discussed some epistemic assumptions of comparative communication research. Most difficulties of comparative research stem from the problem of context-boundness. The next section will examine the problem of comparability at the various stage of research process.

PROBLEMS OF COMPARABILITY

The problem of comparability arises at different stages of the research process. For the purposes of discussion, I divide the research process into three general stages that correspond approximately to the sequence of operations involved in comparative inquiries (Armer, 1973): 1) Formulation of comparable concept; 2) Selection of societies and research sites; 3) Development of equivalent measurement.

Formulation of Comparable Concept

This problem is related to the question, "how can we be certain that the concepts selected to compare societies cross-culturally do not distort the events and situations we wish to study?" (Smelser, 1967: 8) In other words, in what sense is it appropriate to apply the concept "communication" both to an

African farmer and to an American farmer? These questions arise at the stage of the formation of research problems and hypotheses. Let me start with an example. Lerner (1958) developed the concept, "empathy" to compare individuals' characteristics and tendencies toward modernization in different countries. Lerner theorized that high empathic capacity was the predominant personal style in modern society, which was distinctively industrial, urban, literate, and participant. The capacity for empathy could be promoted by the mass media. In terms of this criterion, people's capacity for empathy, the Middle East countries are defined as the "transitional" societies in between the "traditional" and the "modern" societies.

Thus, types of societies are categorized in terms of types of individual ability to empathize. Is this conceptualization appropriate to compare the "modernity" of different countries? The answer is no, because the concept of empathy is defined in terms of Western achievement values. Lerner operationalizes it as individual ability to imagine oneself in a situation other than one's own and acting roles which one has never performed. In this case, the concept of empathy is not a "nonculture-bound" (Sjoberg, 1955) one which will lead to testable hypotheses. It is not also a comparable, ideal-typical concept which will lead the way to the understanding of phenomena.

Related to the difficulty of conceptualization, several comparative researchers suggest different possible strategies.

Prezeworski and Teune (1970), and Noah and Eckstein (1969) propose hypothetico-inductive reasoning to the relationship between theory and empirical data. They contend that to construct universal statements stemming from comparisons among different social systems, the names of systems (countries) must be replaced by the names of variables. According to them, at the stage of formation of problems and hypotheses, it is crucial to find nonculture bound concepts to reduce cultural specificity. Holt and Turner (1972) summarize this point:

> The concepts that are used in the hypotheses to be tested in a research design must be nonculture-bound, at least as the concepts are applicable to the cultures that will be embraced by the generalizations which grow out of the findings (p. 47).

The authors point out the tendency for concepts in research hypotheses to revert to parochial and non-comparable status when they are operationalized.

With regard to hypothetico-inductive reasoning, a number of comparative communication researchers have tried to observe relationships between media systems and the variables of national development. Nixon (1960, 1965) correlated press freedom with the variables of income, literacy, and daily newspaper circulation, which are operationalized as indices of national development. Following the Nixon studies, many correlational analyses (Farace, 1966; Nam and Oh, 1973; Weaver, 1977) have tested the role of mass media in development of different social sectors. For example, Farrace identified six regional systems which are characterized by 54 socio-economic variables. Then he

correlated those clustered regional systems with indices of mass media development. He found television sets and newspaper circulation per capita are highly associated with industrialization and income per capita.

The above correlational analysis on the media and national development are based on a functional theory of society which views the media as a social network. As shown in Nixon, Farace, and Nam and Oh, a mass media system is examined in terms of its relations to the larger social systems, such as the economic, political, and cultural systems of society. The theoretical problem of these correlational analyses is not the focus of this paper. However, it must be noted here that a simplistic correlation of the media system with other social systems may lead to superficial inferences as to the function of the media system in society. In spite of the advantage of structural-functional approaches in dealing with a system as a whole related to other components, there is a risk that a system is interpreted as a given one, ignoring the existing disparity of power and different historical conditions among diverse systems.

In contrast to the above positivistic reasoning, Holmes (1978) suggests that the ideal-typical approach is useful for conceptualizing context-bound phenomena. Holmes argues that any view of the world must be limited and partially conditioned by the observer's point of view. To reduce this kind of subjectivity and to make sense of unique and complex data, ideal-

typical concepts could be appropriate.[5] The ideal-typical approach does not look for causal explanations. Rather, it seeks for an "internally consistent" conceptual pattern which brings together certain relationships and events of historical life into a complex. Weber (1924) writes:

> (Causal explanation) requires as an indispensable preparation the isolation (that means, abstraction) of the individual components of the course of events, and for each component the orientation toward rules of experience and the formulation of clear concepts. This should be taken into account especially in the economic field in which inadequate conceptual precision can produce the most distorted evaluations (quoted in Roth, 1971: 82; Emphases author's).

Holmes' use of Weber suggests that ideal-typical concepts can be constructed in accordance with a classificatory scheme which include sub-categories such as 1) political data, 2) economic data, 3) religious data, 4) educational data, 5) data about social structure, 6) data about fine arts, and 7) legal data. The ideal-typical model which consists of these sub-categories can be a device that explicitly links substantive theory and empirical data.

Few comparative communication researchers are concerned with the ideal-typical approach for constructing comparable concepts. Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm's (1956) work posit four ideal-types of the world's press system: 1) authoritarian, 2) libertarian, 3) Soviet communist, and 4) the social responsibility systems. Based upon these ideal-typical models, Lowenstein (1970) and Hachten (1981) propose similar types of

world press systems. These classifications of the media system are attractively simple, but they are neither mutually exclusive nor comprehensive. For instance, the social responsibility model proposed by Siebert et al. is not a parallel system as are the others. All press systems are socially responsible. The social responsibility model is a part of or any of other three, because the Soviet press, for example, is also responsible when it follows the Soviet government policy.

In spite of these theoretical flaws in these classifications of the press system, the ideal-typical approach in comparative communication research needs to be promoted. If an ideal-typical concept, for instance "developmental journalism," is created and sharpened through the historical configuration of concrete problems of the media in developing countries, it facilitates the analysis of empirical questions and the formulation of hypotheses.[6]

The difficulty of reasoning about the relation of substantive theory to empirical data arises more sharply at the stage of data collection, which I want to discuss in the next section.

Selection of Societies and Research Sites

When a researcher compares different societies, the first task for data collection is to select a "comparable" sample, i.e., societies or cultures. At the stage of selecting comparable units, the problem of comparability is related to the

question, "how is it possible to compare very different social units (or social systems) with one another?" Is it meaningful to compare a highly industrialized country in the West with a less industrialized developing country?

The problem of selecting comparable units arises at various levels: international, national, institutional, group, social movement, or whatever. Depending upon the purpose of study, comparative researchers need to know which dimension(s) they want to use in making comparisons. Prezeworski and Teune (1970) discuss two strategies for selecting comparable units: "most similar systems design" and "most different systems design." The former design assumes that similar characteristics in societies are regarded as "controlled" variables and intersystematic differences are treated as "explanatory" variables. The objective of this design is to maximize common features of compared societies and minimize or isolate different factors.

The "most different systems design" compares variations among several dissimilar societies (either by time or place) which contain identical features. This design focuses upon the central social fact to be studied (usually held constant) rather than the background variables. Prezeworski and Teune see it as an alternative strategy, because it takes variations of the observed behavior such as attitude and voting behavior, rather than variations at the societal level.

Nadel's (1952) analysis of witchcraft among the Nuge and Gwari is a good example of "most similar systems design" in which the two societies share closely related languages, identical kinship systems, and very similar social, political, economic, and belief systems with one exception: in Gwari, women are economically dependent, and witchcraft accusations are made against men, while in Nupe, women are economically independent, and witchcraft accusations are made against women. Nadel sought to explain this difference in witchcraft as a result of the economic position of women.

Nadel's study illustrates a selection strategy that maximizes similarities between societies and concentrates on the conditions to be explained. This so called specification strategy, is to identify and hold constant all variables except those under consideration. However, in actual practice, such kinds of complete control of "background variables" are never achieved. There has been somewhat of an approximation of specification. Weber's study of religion in capitalism may be a good example of approximate control of background variables based on specification strategy such as:

> A variable cannot, of course, be isolated unless other possibly important variables can, within a relevant range of variation, either be held constant or their independence demonstrated. Weber attempted to deal with this problem by showing that, in the different societies he treated, before the development of the religious ideas in which he is interested, the state of the material factors and their prospective autonomous trends of development was, in the relevant respects, essentially similar (Parsons, 1951; quote in Payne, 1971: 18).

Weber controlled for variation in economic factors while he observed the varying conditions of capitalism by selecting certain cases (Western Europe, India and China). However, as Payne (1971) argues, specification strategy runs a risk of ignoring variations within types (societies) and analysis tends to use a static model of a "traditional" or "custom-bound," unchanging societies.

Due to difficulties in specifying background variables, many comparative researchers employ "most different systems design." One of the main assumptions of this design is that system factors do not play any role in explaining the observed behavior. With this assumption, the investigator draws a sample of individuals, groups, or institutions from several communities from several countries. Then differences among the sample are compared within and across communities, and within and across countries. The large majority of studies in this different system design are surveys that employ comparable sampling procedures and interview schedules across communities and countries.

In comparative communication research, few researchers have been concerned with the problem of selecting comparable units. Most of the available examples of comparative communication research disregard the problem of selecting units. For example, Nnaemeka and Richstad's (1981) analysis of Pacific press systems has been quoted as a study which tests the relationships between national variables and news flow. The authors define the Pacific

Basin as "the island states of the South Pacific Ocean (Oceania) and continental states of Asia and North America bordering that region" (p. 105). The reason for choosing the Pacific Basin--including states and territories-- is that variations among these countries make it possible "to evaluate the results of the analysis in the framework of broader international communication flow." [7] Nnaemeka and Richstad correlate social dimensions and political control with foreign news coverage patterns. These independent variables such as social dimensions and political control are emerged by a factor analysis.

A problem results from comparing very different social systems by using such indicators as media penetration, socioeconomic advancement, and political control. One of the basic assumptions in comparing different social units is that independent variables observed within social units do not violate the assumption of the homogeneity of the total system. In this study, the selected 25 countries are not homogeneous in any aspects except three dimensions measured by three independent variables. In other words, system factors in 25 countries are disregarded without any considerations. It is not explained by the authors in what sense Tahiti and Japan can be compared. Most comparative communication research is conducted in societies that have been selected on the basis of convenience, available contacts, and hastily expected generalizations (achieved by including many countries). Obviously there is no complete consideration of all the variations in selecting comparable units. However, a large

number of sample units does not gurantee an appropriate comparison. As a matter of fact, as shown in Nnaemeka and Richstad study, selecting simply a large number of sample units may result in spurious comparisons.

In sum, the problem in selecting comparable units is also related to the problem of context-boundness or controlling background system factors. Two selecting designs have been used in comparative research although both do not satisfactorily answer the question of how two different social units are comparable. This does not mean no research at all. Rather comparative communication researchers need to be conscious of the difficulties of selecting comparable units.

Development of Equivalent Measurement

This problem mainly comes from difficulties in constructing appropriate research tools (e.g., questionnaire items, observational units) for the intended theoretical variables. The problem of equivalent measuring instruments has been the most extensively discussed in comparative research method (Frey, 1970; Warwick and Osherson, 1973; Armer and Grimshaw, 1973).

The main problem in developing an equivalent measuring instrument is related to two questions: 1) how to establish equivalence by translating the items and questionnaires literally into another language, 2) how to build the same concept or variables by indexing various numbers of indicators in different

countries? The first question is aimed at securing appropriate translation. Several techniques have been proposed by using a "back translation" (Frey, 1970; Brislin, Lonner, and Thorndike, 1973). Brislin et al. propose five techniques to demonstrate equivalence: "1) comparisons of measuring between the original and back translated forms, 2) comparisons of meaning, by bilinguals other than the translator, between the original and translated form, 3) answering questions written about the context of the original version; the questions should be answered correctly by people who have read only the target version, 4) comparing performance to instructions written in the original and in the target language, 5) administering both versions of a text or questionnaire to sample of bilinguals" (Brislin, Lonner, and Thorndike: 58).

However, the literal translation is not sufficient condition for equivalent measurement. Functional equivalence has been proposed to answer the second question of how to build the same concepts or variables by indexing various numbers of indicators in different countries (Prezeworski and Teune, 1970; Verba, 1971; Armer, 1973). Functional equivalence refers to the fact that "the same function may be performed by alternative institutions or in alternative way" (Verba, 1971: 315). For example, the notion of needs has been proposed by the uses and gratifications approach to explain individuals' uses of the media. Four media needs or motivations such as surveillance, curiosity, diversion and personal identity (Blumler, 1979) were operationalized as

functionally equivalent indices to compare media uses in different countries (Katz and Wedell, 1977; Weaver and DeBock, 1980).

Individual needs are measured in terms of "what are your reasons for viewing this program?" rather than "what about it do you find true-to-life?" (Blumler, 1979: 33). [8] The perception of meanings and values attached by the audience is disregarded, even though there are differences across societies in the meaning of the audience's needs. In that sense, these need or motivation variables are not equivalent across societies.

In this connection, the problem of equivalent measurement can be discussed in terms of "etic" (outside and not context-bound) versus "emic" (inside and context-bound) approaches which are derived from cultural anthropology (Pike, 1966; Geertz, 1979). While the etic approach compare cultures with categories and concepts by the outsider's viewpoint, the emic approach look at cultures from the insider's point of view.

On the basis of the etic approach, many standardized measuring instruments such as semantic differential scale and modernity scale (Inkeles and Smith, 1974) are developed. An important assumption in the use of these standardized etic instruments is that they are invariant in time within countries and then reflect differences across countries (Verba, 1971; Peschar, 1982). However, it is unlikely for investigators to be confident about whether the standardized instruments are equivalent stimuli in

different settings. In order to get eqivalent measuring instruments, investigators must be familiar with what meanings would be assigned by members of each cultures. In other words, emic approach from the insider's point of view needs to be implemented to identify "shades of meaning" of measuring instruments (Jones, 1979; Niessen, 1992).

Shortly, the issue of equivalent measurement is the problem of reliability of a measuring instrument in different culture. To construct a reliable instrument, emic and etic approaches need to be integrated.

CONCLUSIONS

In the foregoing paragraphs I have discussed a number of unresolved methodological problems that have plagued comparative communication research. It has not been my purpose to deal with all the issues involved in the problem of comparability. I have examined some epistemic assumptions of comparative communication research in terms of the research process.

Little comparative communication research is concerned with the unique problem of the comparative method. The first section examined what "comparative" means by reviewing various field of the social science. It was concluded that the comparative method is distinctive because of the context-boundness. To deal with the spatio-temporal context, comparative method requires some different forms of research procedures. Taking into account of

this context-boundness, I defined comparative communication research as the study of communication process by analyzing the operation and interaction of the media among different societies and areas of societies.

From the overview of epistemic assumptions, it became clear that over the conflict between ideographic versus nomothetic positions, comparative communication researchers need to avoid methodological dogma and to open a horizon toward methodological pluralism. Since the nomothetic orientation is dominant in comparative communication research, context-bound concepts are regarded as "false ideologisation of empirical data." I argued that the formulation of context-bound concepts must be included in the domain of scientific discourse. This means that bridging the epistemological gap between the concepts and social context is an inevitable process for the meaningful interpretation of the data. This implied that a qualitative and quantitative dichotomy is not useful, and that comparative communication researchers need not to be unconscious or overconscious but conscious of the problem of context-boundness.

The problem of comparability is also examined in terms of the research process. A nomothetic orientation is dominant at the stages of concept formation, selection of social units, and equivalent measurement. It was confirmed that most comparative communication researches are conducted following the positivistic logic of science. Most studies try to construct nonculture-bound

concepts and indicators which are operationalized by functionally equivalent measuring instruments. Much comparative communication research examined in the last section failed to cope with the fundamental problem of comparability, and to draw meaningful theoretical interpretation of media phenomena across societies. The "variable analysis" (e.g., Nnaemeka and Richstad, 1979) which replaces the names of social systems with variables lead to spurious comparisons of media systems. These kinds of studies disregard the real issue of context-boundness.

In sum, my thesis is that in order to investigate the "shade of meaning" embedded in the social context, theoretical examination is an inevitable process before comparing different social units. For example, before comparing the media systems in Tahiti and Japan, a question must be raised by the investigator: In what sense are the newspapers in Tahiti and Japan comparable? This kind of metatheoretical question would have to be proceded by the research design.

However, some preliminary theoretical examinations of the social context to be compared are not sufficient for an appropriate comparison. A crucial question of how much theoretical examination must be done prior to the research is still left out. Mokrzycki (1982) elaborates upon this point as follows:

> What is probably most important is that such an examination can well discourage one from engaging in the particular project in the first place. As to the central question whether comparative research is possible at all, it seems to be quite clear that in

> many cases it is not possible or, rather, that it does not make sense since it would result in comparing different types of phenomena on the assumption that they are of one type, and thus produce purely intellectual artifacts (p. 50).

Obviously, this is exaggerated. With regard to the problem of comparability, what we need to do is to spend more time to take into account the nature of context-boundness.

Notes

1. This is a colloqualism meaning horse droppings.

2. It is interesting to note that while AEJMC has an "international communication" division, ICA does have an "intercultural and development" division. I think the confusion must be removed.

3. As noted earlier, the focus is on mass communication rather than interpersonal and intercultural communication.

4. Mokrzycki does not clearly define historical law. To reject a law-oriented "objectivist" endeavor, he seems to borrow this term from Weber who tried to explain historical change from the viewpoint of current concerns, i.e., in terms of a question as to how the present social institutions and values come about. For Weber's comparative method, see Roth (1971) and Smelser (1976).

5. For Max Weber's ideal-typical strategies for comparative approach, see Roth (1971) and Smelser (1976).

6. It is worthwhile to note here that ideal-typical concepts are different from descriptive concepts which simply summarize the common features of empirical phenomena. Weber (1949) stresses an ideal type is not "a description of reality but it aims to give unambiguous means of expression to such an description" (p. 34). He writes:

   An ideal type is formed by the one-sided <u>accentuation</u> of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent <u>concrete</u> <u>individual</u> phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified <u>analytical</u> construct (<u>Gedankenbild</u>) (p. 34).

7. On the basis of this rationale, 25 states and territories are selected; the United States, Japan, Thailand, Tahiti, Guam, and etc.

8. For example, surveillance is measured by three indices: 1) I use it to understand what is going on in the country and the world; 2) I can use it to keep up with what the government is doing; 3) it helps me to judge what political leaders are really like.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Almond, G.A. "Comparative Politics." International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences. Vol. 12., 1970.

Armer, M. "Methodological Problems and Possibilities in Comparative Research." In Comparative Social Research: Methodological Problems and Strategy. Edited by M. Armer and A.D. Grimshaw. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1973.

Armer, M and A.D. Grimshaw. eds. Comparative Social Research: Methodological Problems and Strategy. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1973.

Beltran S, L.R. "Alien Premises, Objects, and Methods in Latin American Communication Research." In Communication and Development: Critical Perspectives. Edited by E.M. Rogers. Beverly Hills: Sage. 1976.

Berting, J. "A Framework for the Discussion of Theoretical and Methodological Problems in the Field of International Comparative Research in the Social Science." In Problems in International Comparative Research in the Social Science. Edited by J. Berting, F. Geyer and R. Jurkovich. Oxford, England: Pergamon Press, 1979.

Blumler, J.G. "The Role of Theory in Uses and Gratification Studies." Communication Research 6 (1979): 9-36.

Bristlin, R. W., W.J. Lonner, and R.M. Thorndike. Cross-Cultural Research Methods. New York: Wiley, 1973.

Campbell, D.T. and J.C. Stanley. Experimental and Quasi-Expermental Design for Research. Chicago: Rand-McNally, 1966.

Durkheim, E. The Rules of Sociological Method Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1938.

Edelstein, A.S. Comparative Communication Research. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1982.

Edelstein, A.S. "New Variables for Cross-Cultural Study." In Mass Media Policies in Changing Cultures. Edited by G. Gerbner. New York: John Wiley, 1977.

Farace, V.R. "Mass Communication and National Development." Journalism Quraterly. 43(1966): 305-313.

Frey, F.W. "Cross-Cultural Survey Research in Political Science." In R.T. Holt and J.E. Turner. 1970.

Geertz, C. "From the Native's Point of View: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding." In Interpretive Social Science A Reader. Edited by P. Rabinow and W.M. Sullivan. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1979.

Gitlin, T. "Media Sociology: the Dominant Paradigm." Theory and Society. 6(1978): 205-253.

Hachten, W.A. The World News Prism: Changing Media, clashing Ideologies. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State Univ. Press, 1981.

Halloran, J.D. "The Context of Mass Communication Research." In Mass Communication Review Yearbook. Edited by D.C. Whitney and E. Wartella. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1982.

Holmes, B. Comparative Education: Some Consideration of Method. London: Allen & Unwin, 1981.

Holt, R.T. and J.E. Turner. The Methodology of Comparative Research. New York: The Free Press, 1970.

Hur, K.K. "International Mass Communication Research: A Critical Review of Theory and Methods." In Communication Yearbook 6. Edited by M. Burgoon. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1982.

Inkeles, A. and D.H. Smith. Becoming Modern. Individual Change in Six Developing Countries. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1974.

Jones, S.E. "Integrating Etic and Emic Approaches in the Study of Intercultural Communication." Handbook of Intercultural Communication. Edited by M.K. Asante, E. Newmark, and C.A. Blake. Beverley Hills: Sage, 1979.

Katz, E. and G. Wedell. Broadcasting in the Third World. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1977.

Lasswell, H.D. "The Future of the Comparative Method." Comparative Politics 1(October 1968): 3-21.

Lerner, D. The Passing of Traditional Society. New York: Macmillan, 1958.

Lijphart, A. "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method." American Political Science Review 65(September 1971): 682-693.

Loetsch, M. "How to Achieve Comparability?" in M. Niessen and J. Peschar. 1982.

Lowenstein, R.L. "Press Freedom as a Political Indicator." In International Communicational: Media, Channels, Functions. Edited by Heinz-Dietrch Fisher and J.C. Merrill. New York: Hasting House, 1970.

Marsh, R.M. Comparative Sociology. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967.

Mokrzycki, E. "What to Take into Account When Comparing? The Problem of Context." In M. Niessen and J. Peschar, 1982.

Mokrzycki, E. "On the Adequacy of Comparative Methodology." In Problems in International Comparative Research in the Social Sciences. Edited by J. Berting, F. Geyer and K. Jurkovich. Oxford, England: Pergamon Press, 1979.

Mowlana, H. "A Paradigm for Comparative Mass Media Analysis." In International and Intercultural Communication. Edited by H. Fisher and J.C. Merrill. New York: Hastings House, 1976.

wlana, H. "Trends in Research on International Communication in the United States." Gazette 19 (1973): 79-90.

Nadel, S.F. "Witch-craft in Four African Societies." American Anthropology 54 (1952): 18-25.

Nam, S. and I. Oh. "Press Freedom: Function of Subsystem Autonomy." Journalism Quarterly 50(1973): 744-750.

Niessen, M. "Qualitative Aspects in Cross-National Comparative Research and the Problem of Functional Equivalence." In M. Niessen and J. Peschar, 1982.

Nixon, R.B. "Freedom in the World's Press: A Fresh Appraisal with New Data." Journalism Quarterly 42(1965): 118-119.

Nixon, R.B. "Factors Related to Freedom in National Press Systems." Journalism Quarterly 37(1960): 452-467.

Nnaemeka, T. and J. Richstad. "Internal Controls and Foreign News Coverage: Pacific Press Systems." Communication Research 8 (1981): 97-135.

Noah, H.J. and M.A. Eckstein. eds. Scientific Investigations in Comparative Education. New York: Macmillan, 1969.

O'Brien, R.C. "Professionalism i Broadcasting in Developing Countries." Journal of Communication 27(Spring 1977): 150-153.

Payne, G. "Comparative Sociology: Some Problems of Theory and Method." British Journal of Sociology 24(March 1973): 13-29.

Pike, K.L. "Etic and Emic Standpoints for the Description of Behavior." In Communication and Culture. Edited by A.G. Smith. New York: Holt, Rhinehart & Winston, 1966.

Prezeworski, A. and H. Teune. The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1970.

Ragin, C.C. "Comparative sociology and the Comparative Method." In Comparative Sociological Research in the 1960's and the 1970's. Edited by J.M. Armer and M. Marsh. Netherlands:n Leiden & Brill, 1982.

Roth, G. "Max Weber's Comparative Approach and Historical Typology." In Comparative Methods in Sociology. Edited by I. Vallier. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1977.

Sartori, G. "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics." American Political Science Review 64 (1970): 1033-1053.

Scheuch, E.K. "The Cross-Cultural Use of Sample Surveys: Problems of Comparability." In Comparative Research Across Cultures and Nations. Edited by S. Rokkan. Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1968.

Schwartz, H. and J. Jacobs. Qualitative Sociology. New York: The Free Press, 1979.

Siebert, F., T. Peterson, and W. Schramm. Four Theories of the Press. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1956.

Sjoberg, G. "The Comparative Method in the Social Science." Philosophy of Science 22 (1955): 26-42.

Smelser, N.J. Comparative Methods in the Social Science. Englewood-Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976.

Smelser, N.J. "The Methodology of Comparative Analysis." In Comparative Research Methods. Edited by D. Warwick and S. Osherson. Englewood-Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973.

Smelser, N.J. "Notes on the Methodology of Comparative Analysis of Economic Activity." Social Science Information 6 (1967): 7-21.

Taylor, C. "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man." In Understanding and Social Inquiry. Edited by F.R. Dallmayr and T.A. McCarthy. Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1979.

Verba, S. "Cross-National Survey Research: The Problem of Credibility." In Comparative Methods in Sociology: Essays on Trends and Applications. Edited by I. Vallier. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1971.

Warwick, D.P. and S. Osherson. "Comparative Analysis in the Social Science." In Cross-Cultural Research Methods. Edited by D.P. Warwick and S. Osherson. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973.

Weaver, D. "The Press and Governmental Restrictions: A Cross-National Study over Time." Gazette 23 (1977): 152-170.

Weaver, D. and H. DeBock. "Personal Needs and Media Use in the Netherlands and the United States." Gazette 26 (1980): 171-194.

Winch, P. The Idea of Social Science. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958.